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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAKU 000037

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [AJ](#) [IR](#)  
SUBJECT: IRANIAN STUDENT ACTIVIST ON IRANIAN YOUTH,  
NARCOTICS ISSUES

REF: A) BAKU 27 B) 2008 BAKU 911

Classified By: PolEcon Counselor Rob Garverick for Reason 1.4 (B) and (D)

Summary

1. (C) Maryam, an Iranian women's rights activist studying medicine here, met on two occasions recently with Baku Iran watcher to discuss her views of the women's rights movement in Iran (ref A), and of the lifestyle and attitudes of Iranian students in Baku and of Iranian youth generally (the subject of the current cable). According to Maryam, Iranian students in Baku are better off economically and better connected to regime elements than the average university student in Iran. She claimed that gender mixing, dating, disco dancing, and alcohol/narcotic consumption is common and asserted that overall social attitudes and behavior of many Iranian youth here is more Western/liberal than many Azerbaijani student counterparts. Much of this behavior also exists in Iran, but behind closed doors. Maryam called widespread availability and use of cheap narcotics Iran's biggest problem.

2. (C) On political issues, she claimed that most Iranian youth dislike the regime, reject its ideology, and have no interest in the Palestinians or their problems; though they believe that Israeli behavior and perhaps existence is unjust, they also believe that Israeli people have a right to security. Most Iranian youth focus on their "private space," and are likely to remain passive so long as that is not aggressively threatened. Though nationalistic and responsive to calls for unity against outsiders, they mainly strive to be apolitical. The bottom line, she stated, is that most young Iranians are pro-American lifestyle, but not necessarily "pro-American." End Summary.

Iranian Student in Baku

3. (C) In addition to her student and women's rights activities (ref a), Maryam said that she has worked on narcotics issues and is an active member of the Baku Iranian Students Organization (ISO), an Iranian overseas student group independent of the official regime-sponsored "Islamic Students Society." Although relatively small (only about 30 active members) Maryam claimed that this group has become reinvigorated over the last year, with members coming predominantly from students at the Baku Oil Academy and the Baku State University Medical School. According to Maryam, the group holds discussions and organizes informal social and

cultural events attracting Iranian students.

#### Fear of Surveillance

14. (C) Maryam said that although (or because) they are independent, most Baku ISO members are very nervous about meeting with Azerbaijani or other non-Iranian human rights or civil society activists, and that so far only "two or three" members (including herself) have been willing to have such contacts. She commented that "all our members plan to return to Iran, and are very afraid of being accused (by the Iranian government or GOAJ authorities) of plotting or spying." Maryam added that most Iranian students (including herself) believe that they are being constantly surveilled by Iranian and GOAJ intelligence and by Iranian student informers. For these reasons, she opined that most ISO members, and Iranian overseas students generally, are unwilling to meet U.S. or other foreign diplomats, "although they might meet if (the diplomat) pretended to be a journalist." Note: We have heard similar assertions from other Iranian contacts. While taking the point, Iran watcher stressed that his activities are open and above board, and that he would never agree to manipulate others by posing under any such false flag. End Note.

#### Attractions of Azerbaijan

15. (C) According to Maryam, a variety of motivations lead Iranian students to study in Azerbaijan, despite lack of access to government student loans (available to most other

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overseas Iranian students) and other signs of official discouragement. A few, such as herself or Bahai students, have political encumbrances that prevent them from studying at a university in Iran. Some ethnic Azeri students are attracted by the ability to study in their native language (forbidden in Iran), and/or pursue study of Azeri cultural icons and traditions. But (according to Maryam), by far the biggest draw is the ability for well heeled Iranians to enter most universities (and highly desired faculties like engineering and medicine) here regardless of their high school records or performance on standardized admission tests. She commented that, "unlike Iran," university admission and often "even grades and diplomas" are for sale here to those willing and able to pay the price.

#### Baku's Iranians - Privileged, Well-Connected, and Spoiled

16. (C) Maryam depicted the average Iranian student here as much wealthier, better-connected, and perhaps dumber than the average Iranian university student in Iran. According to Maryam, the typical Iranian student in Azerbaijan comes from a well-to-do family with regime ties or business connections, and has lived a relatively privileged life. "Many are spoiled," she said flatly. In terms of lifestyle, she claimed that many of them are totally Westernized, with stylish clothes, mixed parties, dating, narcotics and/or alcohol consumption, listening to the latest rock music, and trips to the disco the norm. Though stressing that she is not a "wild partier," she said she has been to several parties where children of regime officials and other students took uppers, smoked hashish, and downed alcohol.

#### Future Goals

17. (C) Nothing about this lifestyle should be surprising, she said, because it is the same way many urban youth behave in Iran, paying off police and Basijis when necessary. "The only difference is that here most of it is not secret," she said. She asserted that male Iranian students are not troubled by threatened non-recognition of their Azerbaijani degrees (as opposed to other foreign degrees) by authorities

in Iran because they expect their family or regime connections to see them through, and/or have jobs waiting for them. According to Maryam, many female students from this group seek foreign boyfriends (including Turks), while Iranian males prefer to date Azerbaijani women because, she stated, "they are less assertive and independent" than Iranian women.

#### Cheap Narcotics - "Iran's Biggest Problem"

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¶8. (C) Maryam called widespread availability and consumption of narcotics "the most serious problem facing Iran." According to Maryam, narcotics ranging from hashish to crystal meth and heroin are easily available and relatively cheap in Iran, "much cheaper than in Azerbaijan." She said that many teenagers in Erbil and Teheran (the two Iranian cities in which she has lived) are exposed to narcotics at an early age, and claimed to know of many middle class youth as young as seventeen and eighteen with narcotics problems. She said that one of her neighbors, the 18-year old son of the Mayor of Erbil, was a notorious heroin addict. She claimed that local drug dealers and their locations are well known, as well as "street" language for signaling a buy interest.

¶9. (C) She related that one day, out of curiosity, she watched a local street dealer from a window in her neighborhood for three hours and observed more than 100 people doing business with him. While asserting that poorer youth focus on Hashish, she claimed that middle and upper class youth prefer "hipper" (and more expensive) ecstasy pills and crystal meth. She stated that the previous day one of her Iranian friends reminisced about a holiday party in Teheran where the "generous hosts" passed around a sugar bowl full of ecstasy. According to Maryam, Iranian street prices for ecstasy are about one dollar a tablet. "Hashish is like chocolate," she said; crack cocaine, often brought in from Dubai, is also available and sought after, she noted. She added that "because it is much cheaper in Iran than here," some students even bring crystal meth (and other drugs) with them from Iran through Azerbaijan's relatively porous border

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(ref B). One acquaintance of hers did so in a tube of toothpaste.

#### Changing Narcotics Trends

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¶10. (C) Maryam claimed that thirty years ago the large majority of males of all classes in Iran smoked opium socially, but asserted that in recent years this practice has been greatly reduced. "About eight years ago opium simply disappeared from the (urban) market," she said. While acknowledging that this might reflect a "fashion change," Maryam opined that the main cause was market manipulation. "People were driven away (by narcotics profiteers) from opium towards consumption of more expensive and profitable drugs (such as ecstasy and crystal meth)." While Maryam claimed that she and her friends have no doubt that some senior security authorities collaborate in the profitable narcotics trade ("otherwise how could it be so cheap and easy to get?"), she also believed that other security authorities are genuinely opposed to the business; for example, "many narcotics smugglers are shot." She speculated that not only individual officer but institutional attitudes towards the trade may vary among the various Iranian security organizations, but had no specific facts.

#### Iranian Youth Political Attitudes

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¶11. (C) Maryam said flatly that most Iranians here and in Iran have no interest in the ideology of the Iranian regime or the regime itself beyond utilizing whatever connections they have with it for personal benefit and otherwise

minimizing its impingement on their lives. Nonetheless, their attitude towards international issues tends to be complex. For example, while claiming that most Iranian youth "are not interested in the Palestinians or their problems," and resent Iranian regime subsidies to them, she said that most also dislike Israel and see its policies and even existence as unjust, though acknowledging that its residents have a right to security.

¶12. (C) All this being said, she argued that the bottom line is that most Iranian students, even those who strongly reject the regime in private, do not want to get personally involved in policy issues, and wish to be perceived as apolitical. If forced to take a position on international issues, she said that most adopt a nationalistic "my country right or wrong" approach. She said that regime supporters effectively play on this among youth by conceding that there are many problems in Iran, but stressing the need to remain united and "solve our problems ourselves," without foreign interference. On such issues "many of them are brainwashed," she asserted. In other words, she cautioned, while the majority of Iranian youth may be "pro-American lifestyle," they are not necessarily "pro-America." She predicted that most Iranian students will remain cynically passive, but could erupt if the Iranian regime much more aggressively invades their private space, "or humiliates them."

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